

*Editorial***A LONG, HOT SUMMER: A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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The spring and summer of 2003 have been difficult for many Canadians. This is particularly true for those living in predominantly rural areas in the western part of the country. Problems began in May of this year when a single cow was diagnosed as having Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (BSE). This neurological disorder commonly known as "Mad Cow Disease" has effectively shut down the Canadian cattle industry for the past four months. Hundreds of cattle have been slaughtered and yet none, since that first case, have shown evidence of disease. Shipment of Canadian beef was halted immediately and has only reopened recently to allow limited consignment to other countries. Unfortunately, as one rancher noted in the local newspaper, "the border is more closed than open." Interestingly, cattle producers from the United States have indicated an overriding concern for their cattle industry should the border remain closed. The governor of Montana and various U.S. senators and human resources that rely on the cattle industry for their livelihood. Needless to say, the health care resources of many rural areas have seen the result of the stress brought about by this situation.

The dry, hot summer brought huge wildfires that have decimated large portions of the forests of British Columbia. Thousands of people that live in small communities throughout the interior of that province had to be evacuated. They stood by helplessly as their homes burned to the ground. Firefighters from across the country fought the fires to the point of exhaustion with the assistance of the Canadian Military. The Canadian Red Cross has asked for nurses to help with the casework that surrounds such misfortune. The recruiter I spoke with suggested that nurses are ideal for disaster relief because of their problem solving ability, desire and ability to advocate for clients, and skill at accessing necessary resources in the midst of such devastation. In the past few day's much needed rain has begun to fall in that part of the country. The expectation is that by sometime in October all the fires will be out.

West Nile Virus, a mosquito-borne disease brought into the United States from Africa in the 1960s, has finally found its way to Canada's Prairie Provinces. Saskatchewan has had 68 cases and Alberta has recorded 42. The Canadian Blood Service has stopped accepting donations from the area of the country in which I live because of the possibility of spreading the disease through blood transfusions.

I am sure by this time you are likely wondering what is the point of my relaying information about this devastation to you. Not only are the determinants of health evident in each of the issues faced by Canadians this past summer, but all these disasters piled on top of one another demonstrate the resilience of the rural population. This is likely something that has been passed down from previous generations. Early settlers followed the course of the rivers west and homesteaded large parts of this country. They confronted an frequently hostile environment and made rural Canada one of the mainstays of this country. Earlier generations lived through the drought of the depression

era and survived the economic setbacks of hoof and mouth disease in their cattle. The result of these trials and tribulations was a sense of community that continues to this day.

Community cohesiveness and resilience is apparent when considering the ways in which individuals, populations, and government have banded together to overcome the variety of problems rural Canadians have been confronted with recently. When other countries refused to accept our beef, communities held barbecue's, sold beef for next to nothing from the back of refrigerator trucks, and gave meat to the food banks. As a way to promote beef, the Premiers of the Prairie Provinces, as well as other government officials, served beef on a bun to attendees at a "Rolling Stones" concert. The resoluteness of individuals and communities became apparent during the mass evacuation of people from the path of the fires. The devastation left in the aftermath of the forest fires has resulted in truckloads of goods being shipped to victims to offset the loss of personal items. Others have given up their homes to shelter victims. Still others have forfeited vacation time to help out with disaster relief. The government is stepping in to assist those who do not have property insurance and communities are beginning to recuperate.

Despite the problems encountered over the past several months, I think that those of us who live in Western Canada have discovered a renewed sense of what it means to be Canadian, what it means to be from the west, and most importantly what it means to be rural. We have stuck together through disease, devastation, and pestilence, and we have learned that like our ancestors we too can come back and be even stronger than before.

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